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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR BRASILIA 0287
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 3978
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SUBJECT: SANTIAGO'S REGIONAL LEADERS DISCUSS METROPOLITAN CHALLENGES
WITH AMBASSADOR SIMONS

11. (U) Summary: In meetings with the Ambassador on April 2 and 3, respectively, the Mayor of Santiago listed public education as the biggest priority for his municipality, while the Intendant of the Metropolitan Region focused on public transportation (Transantiago), traffic congestion and public security as primary challenges. End summary.

A Low-profile Mayor Focuses on Education

12. (U) Ambassador Simons accompanied by EPOL Counselor and EPOL Specialist called April 2 on the Mayor of Santiago Raul Alcaino, who has held office since 2004. Mayor Alcaino is not running for re-election. Alcaino has kept a low profile as Mayor, focusing mainly on resolving the traditional problems of the municipality, adopting the role of "efficient executive" rather than "charismatic politician." His main concern is education and the proper allocation of resources for public education. Alcaino is focused on using culture and recreation to bolster education's attractiveness to youth. The basic idea has been to foster among students a sense of belonging to their schools and neighborhoods. His goal is to provide children with a "dream worth fighting for". Alcaino wants students to learn that they can "be more" when they receive their education. Public education in Chile lacks sufficient resources and has long been ignored; the sector needs a modernization plan that involves both the Ministry of Education and the municipal schools' administrative boards.

13. (U) Ambassador asked Alcaino his opinion on the polarization of Chilean politics. Alcaino noted he was of the opposition coalition, but that he has maintained a very good relationship with the central government and has no doubt as to the technical and political capabilities of the current administration. However he criticized politics in Chile as "stuck 30 years in the past." Politicians do not look to the future. There is a tendency to polarize discussions, especially those that are value-based. Currently the parties in the center are vulnerable to this polarization. The Christian Democrats and National Renewal are key hinges in their respective coalitions, but they are susceptible to these forces which escalate the possibility of political divisiveness.

Recently Appointed Metropolitan Leader faces Transantiago

14. (U) Ambassador Simons called on Metropolitan Region (RM) Intendant Alvaro Erazo on April 3. A medical doctor, Erazo, was recently appointed Intendant of the most populous region of the country by President Bachelet in a cabinet shuffle in January. As Intendant, he heads the Metropolitan Regional Government, made up of 6 provinces that incorporate 52 municipalities (including the

Municipality of Santiago). Until now, Erazo's public experience had been mostly in the health sector. Ambassador Simons was accompanied by E/POL Counselor and E/POL Specialist.

15. (U) Erazo listed the main challenges for his region as those of any metropolis: public transportation; roadway infrastructure and traffic congestion; and public security. In addition, because the RM encompasses 18 rural municipalities, the recent drought affecting southern and central Chile poses a serious challenge for the region this year. He also mentioned Santiago's air pollution problem and the related fallout from the disastrous implementation of the Transantiago metropolitan transit plan. He stated that, without a fully-functioning Transantiago that can attract individual drivers away from their cars, it will be very difficult to make any improvements in the RM air quality. The RM currently has 50 stations for checking car and truck emissions and improved norms and regulations are being planned.

16. (U) When asked further about Transantiago, Erazo explained that the public transit system is improving but that there is still much to be done. He noted that, while travel times are still longer for some, the new system is less expensive and safer than the previous bus system. Two of the most critical components that are lacking are items from the original Transantiago design that have not been implemented yet, including exclusive bus lanes and the fleet management software that should allow for better service intervals and lowered rates of fare evasion. In addition, in order to maintain a fleet of buses that are "cleaner" -- Erazo stated that 60% of the current fleet of 6,400 buses use clean but not "super-clean" technology -- they need to install newer, and more expensive, filters.

SIMONS